Values Related to Conflict Management and Resolution in Japan

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Abstract

This paper defines conflict from a cross-cultural perspective, typifies events that produce conflict, specifies conditions for the rise and termination of conflict and distinguishes between cross-cultural conflict and culture-bound, surface manifestations of conflict. It then reviews the mechanisms for managing and resolving conflict. Having laid the above foundation, the paper then proceeds to identify the manner in which certain values of the Japanese culture related to communication may give rise to conflict in a cross-cultural setting. Finally, the paper deals with the values of the Japanese culture toward conflict and identifies certain features of Japanese conflict management which contrast with conflict management strategies strongly recommended for the culture of the United States.

Key Words: Intercultural Communication, Cross-cultural Communication, Conflict, Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution, Values, Communication Variables, Japan, Conflict Reduction.

要　　旨

本稿は，異文化間視点から葛藤を定義し，葛藤を生む事象の特徴を示し，葛藤の発生と終了の条件を明示し，異文化間葛藤と葛藤の文化拘束された外面的顕示との相違を明らかにする。次に本稿は，葛藤を処理し，解消するための機構を概観する。上記の基本事項を設定した後に，コミュニケーションに関係した日本文化の価値観が異文化間環境で葛藤を起こす様態を確認する。最後に本稿は，葛藤に対する日本文化の価値観を扱い，アメリカ文化で強く勧められる葛藤処理方略と対照をなす日本の葛藤処理の特徴を確認する。

Introduction

Every human being brings to every interpersonal and group encounter a set of values and principles (Burgoon and Ruffner, 1978 p. 492). These values and principles not only determine how we perceive, interpret, organize and utilize the messages generated in those encounters, but even whether or not we perceive those messages. These values and principles are the fundamental decisions that the individuals of each culture makes about the self, nature and society and the interfaces of these primordial concepts: the family, human nature and the supernatural (Condon and Yousef, 1975 p. 59). Values affect such fundamental communication variables as the granting of credibility and perceptions related to power and homophily-heterophily. Because conflict can only be manifested through communication behavior, values are of primary importance in understanding how different cultures perceive

and manage conflict. Values are perhaps the most fundamental of all cultural variables, and it therefore should come as no surprise to observe that when individuals or groups communicate in a cross-cultural or intercultural context that they may have differing perceptions of the existence or absence of conflicts, the nature of such conflicts as are perceived and of the appropriate strategies for managing and resolving such conflicts as arise. This paper will examine the manner in which values are related to conflict management and resolution in the Japanese culture.

Definitions

Conflict is the product of interaction either between individuals at dyadic, group or intergroup levels or within the individal. As such, conflict must be defined with reference to situation, goals and means. A dictionary may define conflict as "sharp disagreement, as of ideas or interest; emotional disturbance" (Webster's New World Dictionary, p. 132), and the sociologist may view the purpose of conflict as "to gain or retain desired values which are usually believed to be in scarce supply..." (Himes, p. 14). Both of these definitions are goal oriented and cover both the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of conflict, but a fuller definition of conflict should also refer to both the nature of the goal or source of the conflict and to acceptable means of managing or resolving the conflict.

Burgoon and Ruffner provide a taxonomy of conflicts which better meet these criteria. They envision six types of conflict that may occur at any or all levels of interpersonal interaction.[1] Real conflict is conflict that occurs when both parties perceive a zero-sum situation, ie. a situation in which goals or behaviors are incompatible to the extent that success for one party to the interaction must result in failure for the other interactant. This is the classic definition of social conflict. Artificial conflict resembles real conflict but is a function of perception. For one or both of the parties involved the conflict may be perceived as a zero-sum situation, but in fact it is not and thus goal attainment need not result in frustration for one party. Induced conflict refers to conflict created for some ulterior motive such as the preservation in power of a particular political party or the isolation of one culture from another.

Turning to the means by which we may manage or resolve a conflict, Burgoon and Ruffner identify conflict as being violent or nonviolent depending on whether force or rhetoric is used. When a neutral third party mediates or arbitrates the conflict it is characterized as a mediated conflict. Finally, conflicts may be identified as conflicts of principles or pragmatics depending on whether the central issues revolve around moral or ethical concerns or the pragmatics of implementing certain policies.

If the various levels of interpersonal communication are conceived of as systems, then conflict may be viewed as a process by which the equilibrium of the system is disturbed. Conflict resolution then may be defined as a steady state condition where equilibrium has been restored. Note that there is no presumption of identity or difference between the pre-conflict and post-conflict states.

Conflict management refers to those strategies, primarily communicative and culturally

determined, by which a conflict is perceived, interpreted and acted upon to achieve a resolution. The result of these processes may be viewed positively, negatively or or neutrally by the interactants in terms of the prevailing values of their culture and individual personalities. Note that conflict management refers to a process and conflict resolution refers to a state.

Finally, values are as Barnlund observes,

> The particular set of meanings involving evaluation, invested with more than ordinary emotional significance, that members of a particular culture share. They are, in a sense, the most meaningful of our meanings. They provide the motive for thought and action; they surround and make intelligible every communicative act. (p. 10)

Types of Events that Provoke Conflict

Conflict arises out of risks and as Barnlund points out,

> Communication between any two persons involves a certain risk, for exposure to new meanings can vitalize or undermine existing values and behavior patterns. When such encounters take place within a culture there is some protection in the fact that communicants employ symbols with some consistency, but more importantly that they share a system of rules governing such encounters. When these encounters involve persons of different cultures this protection is largely lacking; communicants interact not only in an unfamiliar medium, but each brings to the situation a divergent set of contextual rules. The magnitude of risk, the possibility of harmful interaction, is therefore multiplied. In cross-cultural communications psychic and social injury may result from the highest motives; demoralizing consequences often accompany the most laudable intentions. (p. 9)

As alluded to by Barnlund, conflict arises at the deepest levels with those values by means of which we construct our concepts of the self, others and the world. Is the self, for example, perceived of as a solitary unit with the power to more or less select its associations with other human beings? Or is it, as is perhaps the case in Japan, impossible to conceive of the self except in a milieu of interpersonal relations ordered hierarchically in terms of length of association and horizontally in intensity of reciprocal obligations. Are other human beings naturally good, naturally evil or capable of balancing between the two? Is the human race master of its fate, or are there some areas of knowledge that will be forever inaccessible? The Japanese culture finds hierarchy to be the natural order of human relations and finds equality uncomfortable while the American finds it difficult to take such beliefs seriously and views such a social structure as stifling. Generally speaking, cross-cultural encounters by their very nature will always lead to an impact on one's self-image or self-concept. Because, as Burgoon and Ruffner (p. 496) point out this always has a potentially serious consequence, we can expect that practically all cross-cultural encounters give rise to conflict.

At a more intermediate level conflict arises out the decisions that cultures make with regard to the system of rules that cultures use to govern the communication process. Certain concepts such as the receiver's decisions regarding the credibility of the source may well be universals of human communication systems, but the criteria by which these decisions are made and the manner in which they are valued are not. As reported in Bowers' research on communication conflict in the filming of the movie *Shogun* in Japan (1985) and in other empirical studies (Minami) and (Nakanishi) as well as in other studies (eg. Owen), the Japanese prefer to give the character variable a greater weight than competence in granting credibility. The criteria for and values placed on such important variables as power and optimum heterophily are also highly variable in the cross-cultural context and a likely source of conflict.

Conflict may also arise out of the strategies employed to manage and resolve conflict. Burgoon and Ruffner referred to mediated conflict in their taxonomy, but dealt with it as being performed primarily by specialists such as lawyers or psychological counsellors (the predominant American orientation). In the Japanese culture mediation is almost universal not only in dealing with conflict, but even in non-competitive interactions. Moreover, it is seldom carried out by professionals. Leveling, or self-disclosure, is a valued American practice in the management of conflict but as reported in certain studies (Owen, Bowers, Nakanishi) the Japanese do not view self-disclosing behavior in the same way or as positively. Self-disclosure may, in fact, be viewed as creating a debt with which the recipient may not wish to be burdened.

The conditions cited above are those in which values are involved and thus often the most difficult under which to perceive conflict or assess it correctly. Conflict may also arise for reasons that are easier to see. There are cultures that do not, as Barnlund points out, "agree upon the desirability of exposing their values to the scrutiny of, or commerce with, alien moralities." (p. 11) Conflict may arise because of competition for scarce resources such as the minds of human beings and the money in their pockets or labor of their bodies. Indeed, in the words of Burgoon and Ruffer, "Our first assumption is that individuals in society are not naturally in a state of harmony, and therefore, conflict is a natural and inevitable occurrence of the human condition." (p. 495) Many of us might agree with them, but even this assumption may give rise to conflict. The Japanese often refer to their country as "the land of *Wa*" and use the Chinese character for harmony in this regard. For them the state of harmony is the most valued goal of the society and conflict is neither an inevitable nor natural consequence of the human condition.

Cross-cultural vs. Culture Bound Manifestations of Conflict

The popular literature on intercultural and cross-cultural encounters abounds with anecdotes which aptly illustrate the differences between cross-cultural conflicts and culture-bound manifestations of conflict. One illustration from my personal experience may serve to make this distinction. A few years ago at an international conference in Guam several colleagues and I were having an impromptu party at the chalet where my wife and I were

staying. We ran out of beer, and my wife, who is Japanese, called the hotel room service and ordered more. She clearly specified that, the beer was to be brought "right away." Three hours later, after our friends had departed, a case of beer arrived. My wife began to berate the young man who had made the delivery. Several times she reiterated the concept of "right away." The young man defended himself by insisting that he had, indeed, delivered the beer "right away." When the young man departed, my wife attributed the whole affair to his laziness and weakness of character in refusing to accept responsibility for the incident. That was a surface manifestation of the conflict.

Of course, the true conflicts lay much deeper. First, there are very real differences in the way in which cultures view time, as researchers like Hall and Bruneau have pointed out. Secondly, there is, as was alluded to earlier in the quotation from Barnlund, a divergent set of contextual rules which were being applied in this encounter. Although the Japanese concepts of time differ from those of North Americans in important ways, they are relatively close in terms of defining and valuing promptness and far removed from those of the Chomoro people of Guam. In Japan when conflicts arise between a customer and the purveyor of a service, the customer is literally "always right." (The Japanese expression is, in fact, the customer is god). At any rate, in a conflict of this type the expected response is that the individual providing the service will not engage in active defence as that would only serve to intensify the conflict. The perception of the young man as lazy and surly was probably unjustified and an assertion of "different cultures—different customs" would equally fail to see that the source of conflict most likely derived from deep cultural values related to time and social obligations. In other words, had the conflict arisen because the young man in question was truly lazy and surly, we could label it as a culture-bound surface manifestation of conflict. On the other hand, if the conflict arose because the interactants were valuing time and interpersonal relations differently because of culturally imposed behavioral systems, then we would label the conflict as one that was primarily cross-cultural in nature.

Functions of Conflict

Conflict is generally valued negatively in the American and Japanese cultures. In the American culture communication behavior under conflict conditions is described as becoming polarized, defensive, restrictive and highly controlled. People are said to become less communicative because of real or imagined differences. The conflict may also intensify real or imagined differences and impede the efficiency of interactions among individuals or groups. Conflict may have a damaging effect on the self-concept and it may breed distrust and suspicion.

On the other hand, conflict may, as Coser (1956) points out, be beneficial. For example, conflict often leads to the formation of associations and coalitions among individuals and groups who otherwise might have no reason to get together Conflict may also prompt necessary social change, though the judgement as to what is necessary is a question of ethics. And, to the extent that conflict is tolerated, it may serve as an indicator of the value

of a relationship. Conflict may also serve to evaluate existing and operable systems and promulgate advances in scientific and technological development. Conflict can be a catalyst for individual and group improvement and, finally, conflict can be enjoyable.

In cross-cultural settings all of these functions may also apply, but some will occur more frequently than others. Certainly, conflict between cultures has resulted in what many would view as social changes, improvements and advances in scientific and technological development. However, not all cultures are in agreement on the positive value of these functions. There are cultures that view change negatively and others for whom scientific and technological development has meant the sacrifice of other traditional and cherished values. There are cultures where conflict is enjoyable, but others that abhor the very concept. Perhaps, the majority of the world's cultures see no benefit in conflict as an evaluation of existing and operable systems. But, in the case of the technologically and commercially oriented nations of the industrialized democracies conflict may well serve to demonstrate the value that they place on their interdependence, politically and economically.

At any rate, we should observe that conflict is almost certainly a natural consequence of cross-cultural and intercultural encounters. Such conflict may or may not be negatively valued by the participants to the encounter. In fact, an external observer may find it unwise to label the conflict either positively or negatively. Moreover, such conflicts as arise are just as likely to be aggravated by continuing and effective communication as they are likely to mitigate it. In short, such conflict may not be bad and more communication may not result in reducing the conflict.

Japanese Value Orientations

Over the past several years Bowers has conducted several studies of Japanese value orientations including a case study of the conflicts arising in the course of communication among the American and Japanese film teams who made the movie *Shogun* in Japan. On the basis of these studies let us briefly review those Japanese value orientations that I believe most frequently affect communication in cross-cultural encounters to which the Japanese are a party.

Self Concept Values

Among values which affect the self-concept, there is an important distinction to be made between cultures which value individualism, individuality and interdependence (Condon and Yousef 1975). The American culture is said to value individualism. This is an orientation in which when group values and individual values are in conflict, the conflict is resolved in favor of the individual. The opposite case is interdependence where such a conflict would be resolved in favor of the group. The Japanese culture is often cited as an example of the latter orientation.

However, there may be greater descriptive insight to be gained by defining interdependence more precisely and postulating, as Condon and Yousef do, a third orientation—individuality. In the interdependent culture not only are group vs. individual conflicts

resolved in favor of the group, they are not even likely to arise. Members of a truly interdependent culture are said to have a very limited concept of self and to see themselves as merely organic extensions of the group, much as the limbs and organs of the body are extensions of that body with no concept of independence. A culture which hold an individuality orientation, however, is one in which its members express their individuality within the context of a group and express their solidarity with the group to outside individuals and rivals groups. Yet, within the group conflict not only exists and is tolerated, it is even encouraged as a means of maintaining a vigorous and healthy group entity. To anyone who has ever experienced membership in a Japanese group or observed the very intense expressions of individual will and conflicts of interest that often occur it would seem far more reasonable to attribute this orientation of individuality to the Japanese culture than one of interdependence. The readiness with which many young Japanese sojourners in the U. S. adapt to expressions of American individualism may also serve as an indicator of this orientation. Conversely, the unified front which this orientation requires toward outsiders would suggest that empirical studies of this orientation would have to be conducted very carefully to avoid confounding it with either the interdependent or individualism orientations.

Other value orientations toward the self such as those toward age and sex of the source are also likely to affect encounters between Japanese and representatives of other cultures. The Japanese continue to value old age in their leaders and male superiority is still valued in most decision-making situations. Both of these orientations may generate some conflict when communicating with representatives of a culture like that of the United States. Most Japanese business people would, for example, still require a great mental effort to grant credibility to a woman or an individual younger than themselves in a business venture that required negotiations with such representatives of a potential partner.

The value orientation toward activity held by the Japanese also varies somewhat with traditional analyses of this sort. The three orientations offered by Condon and Yousef are doing, being-in-becoming and being. Americans are said to value the doing orientation. This is an orientation which is task and goal orientated. An activity is valued to the extent that it moves one closer to its goal. Inactivity is negatively valued. Americans are uncomfortable with nothing to do. In Bowers' study of the making of *Shogun*, the director, Jerry London, was very proud of his ability to plan his shooting schedule so flexibly that no time need be lost regardless of the complications and emergencies that arose. This is an extreme example of the doing orientation and is complemented by the American positive evaluation of people who do things well. How well one does an activity is often more important than one's character.

The being orientation represents the polar opposite; a culture whose members are content with little or no change. In such a culture people are born into a particular station and function in life and do not conceive of any alternatives. The Japanese have in the past been described as holding this orientation, but neither this orientation nor the doing orientation really seem consistent with modern Japanese culture.

It is most likely that the Japanese value a being-in-becoming orientation toward activity.

This is an orientation found among certain American and European sub-cultures such as artists. It is characterized by a goal orientation however, the goal is not specifically task oriented but rather a superordinate goal of the society and common to a great many activities Being-in-becoming is the orientation of Jonathan Livingston Seagull or the Franciscan friar who by means of the activity being pursued strives for a deeper understanding of the self and greater fulfilment as an individual. This is the orientation of the artist who feels that she becomes a more complete human being by performing her art to the best of her ability. Because the being-in-becoming orientation has surface manifestations of both being and doing, it can result in conflicts when either Japanese or members of other cultures incorrectly attribute one or the other orientation to representatives of the Japanese culture.

Social Values

Among value orientations related to perceptions of societies, Japanese values toward group membership, intermediaries, formality, property, and social reciprocity are relevant to cross-cultural communication. First, of course, the Japanese value membership in relatively few groups with prolonged identification with the groups and subordination of the individual to the group in cases of intergroup conflict or competition. These descriptions, hower, must be interpreted in terms relevant to the Japanese culture. Subordination of the individual to the group need not and usually does not mean a loss of individual identity. For one thing, the individual finds his/her most satisfactory expression through group affiliation and toward the members of the group. Secondly, subordination to the group means that the individual finds pursuit of the superordinate goals shared by all members of the groups more satisfying than the pursuit of goals held by her/him alone.

Prolonged identification means that the Japanese view membership in all groups as potentially permanent and expect that most groups that are formed will realize this potential. An individual who belongs to several groups will find that these groups are hierarchically ranked and behave accordingly should conflicts arise among obligations to these various groups. Fulfilling obligations to a group higher in the hierarchical chain does not release one from fulfilling obligations to those lower in the chain, nor is entry to or exit from a group a voluntary decision of the individual. In the latter case mobility in both directions is a delicate, lengthy, serious and mutual process. Even task and fortuitous social groups are considered to be potentially permanent and require delicate and pervasive assessment of the interpersonal network before engaging in the accomplishment of the goals for which they are formed.

The Japanese value toward property is essentially private in orientation as is to be expected of merchants and business people, however, it may still give rise to conflicts in encounters with cultures where utilitarian or communal values toward property are the norm. The Japanese are very fond of personal items such as fountain pens which are attributed a utilitarian value in many South-east Asian and African cultures. More than one tempest in a teacup has arisen when a Japanese accused an individual who was merely using a pen, the way we drink water at a public water fountain, of stealing a treasured

belonging.

Social reciprocity refers to values toward the mutuality of social relationships. In the dominant American culture the belief is that individuals voluntarily form and break social ties. We join clubs and quit companies according to the dictates of our consciences and personalities. Even the strongest of contractual ties can be challenged in courts and none of our social institutions, including marriage and parenthood, is characterized by obligatory and unbreakable bonds. This is said to be an orientation of independence.

In contrast, most of the world's cultures view social interactions as obligatory and permanent and do not see them as being subject to the whims of the individual. However, there is variation in the direction and form of such obligatory ties, and this gives rise to two general orientations: symmetrical and complementary. The symmetrical-obligatory relationship is illustrated in gift giving or leasing a house. If I give you a gift and you feel that you must give me one of equal value in return, then a symmetrical obligatory relationship exists between us. If I pay rent to you for a room and I expect to receive equal value for my money, then again a symmetrical obligatory relationship exists.

The complementary obligatory relationship is illustrated by the relationship between a child and its parents. Parents may give birth to and raise a child, but a child cannot give birth to and raise its parents. Likewise, the relationship is completely obligatory. Parents do not choose their children and children do not choose their parents. The obligations that parents have toward children have one form, but those that the child has toward its parents must be of another form, even though reciprocal and obligatory. The Japanese consider social relationships of this type to be the norm for their society. It is reflected even in the language where terms like *sempai* and *kohai* (roughly senior members of a relationship) and *sensei* (teacher) and *deshi* (apprentice or disciple) abound.

Finally, the Japanese in common with most cultures in the world view formality as the oil that lubricates interpersonal relations and the glue that holds society together. Formality is not mere blind obedience to tradition, but is the all pervasive form of interpersonal interactions by which an individual demonstrates trustworthiness and gains credibility. It is not selective as in most European and Latin American cultures and is a far cry from the vaunted informality of the U. S. Appropriate formalism in the Japanese culture is one of the primary means by which a source can manipulate the credibility variable and insure that two communicants are operating within the same set of rules governing a particular encounter.

In encounters between Japanese and Americans we can expect that the differing values outlined above will have a significant impact on the quality of communication, particularly as it affects perceptions, interpretations and credibility. Although American participants will recognize that Japanese function in groups, they are likely to interpret the expression "group" in terms relevant to American culture. For example, they may attribute greater mobility and voluntariness to the group behavior of Japanese. They may assume that Japanese group leaders can strongly influence subordinates. (The latter is not necessarily the case when group goals as a whole are involved). They may assume that Japanese task group composition is based on criteria of competence rather than interpersonal criteria. They may fail

to see that viewing all groups as permanent or potentially permanent associations will logically demand that the Japanese participants in the encounter approach the formation of new groups—even for business—warily and with special attention to interpersonal relations before getting on with the task. The being-in-becoming orientation in particular means that many extraneous—to Americans—factors must be considered in making any task related decisions.

Control Values

This latter discussion of permanence of association and superordinate goals affecting tasks implies differences in which the two cultures manage the accomplishment of a task. The manner in which the Japanese manage the control function necessary to the accomplishment of most tasks may also give rise to conflict as Bowers discovered in his study of the filming of *Shogun*. Americans manage and control a task primarily by means of time. Planning is future-oriented and complex tasks are compartmentalized and scheduled in detail. Individual and team areas of responsibility may be designated, but if members are incompetent or for some reason unable to carry out a task, they are replaced with those who are. In general, the task moves forward according to schedule.

The Japanese manage and control a task by means of people. There may be rough deadlines, but the emphasis in planning is on determining objectives and procedures for a fixed team. Scheduling is added on at a later stage. When individuals are unable to perform a task, then that task may be transferred to another member of the group or several members will compensate. If additional time is required all will simply work overtime until the task is complete. When only a key individual has the necessary skills and is unable to perform. The task may temporarily come to a halt. The Japanese do use time as a control but not as rigidly and not as compartmentally as Americans. Moreover, the basic emphasis is on planning around reconciling the division of labor and processes necessary to accomplishment of the task by the group to which it has been assigned.

Mechanics for Handling Conflict

Steinhoff (1983) in speaking of Japanese conflict resolution says,

> Regardless of the source or scale of the conflict, the experience of direct, face-to-face confrontation between individuals is regarded as extremely unpleasant. By contrast, expressing direct conflict in a large solidary group is less traumatic and may even occasionally be a satisfying experience. This strong aversion to direct interpersonal confrontation implies a high sensitivity to the potential for conflict and a willingness to expend considerable energy to avert unpleasant incidents. The range of conflict-resolution processes used in Japan may be understood in terms of these cultural preferences. (p. 351)

One of the distinctive features of the current era of cross-cultural contacts is that much of that contact occurs at the interpersonal level as individuals and small groups meet to conduct business, exchange knowledge or simply visit another culture. In fact, this may

even be the normal form of cross-cultural contact among the industrialized nations of the so-called first world. If this is the case, then Steinberg's observations regarding the Japanese sensitivity to and aversion of direct, interpersonal conflict have a number of important implications with regard to traditionally recommended strategies for managing conflict.

Tolerance of Conflict

First, we may note that the Japanese may have a greater preference for tolerating a conflict and allowing its continuance without resolution than a culture such as that of the USA which values problem-solving so highly. I can think of no better illustrations of this concept than the as yet unresolved series of trade frictions between Japan and the US and Western Europe. Although the Japanese are often accused of stalling in the negotiations seeking to resolve these matters, it may be more of a case of combining a higher toleration of continued conflict with a very real avoidance-avoidance conflict. (In the latter case domestic opposition from important segments of the society versus friction with allies and trading partners).

The Japanese may also be more tolerant of leaving the field as a measure for dealing with conflict than many cultures. A personal experience that may be insightful for many American colleagues may illustrate this. In my faculty we have elections for dean of the faculty every two years. Several years ago the election was held just before the summer vacation. There were two candidates, and as it happened the vote of the faculty was exactly split between them. Seventeen ballots were held with the same result. At last, the candidate of the faction currently out of power asked for the floor and volunteered to concede his candidacy.

In the American culture this probably would have resolved the deadlock, but in this case instantly the entire faculty was on its feet rejecting this proposal. I was personally shocked at the extent of my own acculturation in that I also not only reacted the same way, but was certain at a gut level of its rightness. The conflict was resolved in favor of leaving the field. In spite of serious complications for university administrative procedures, we decided to postpone the election until the fall term. When the next ballot was held in the fall, the faction out of power had proposed a new candidate and the candidate of the faction in power was elected on a single ballot.

The point of this incident is that we, as members of a Japanese group, presume our association to be permanent. This is true regardless of the existence of factions and individuals with differing and in some cases irreconcilable views. A split of the nature threatened in the incident above might well result in the group's ceasing to function as a viable entity, and that was one point on which all members were in agreement. Regardless of personal and factional interests continuation of our group, composed of the then existing membership, and of our associations was the supreme, superordinal goal. Under such circumstances leaving the field until an alternative solution became available was certainly preferable. More than the persistence and tenacity of supporters for their factions, the real lesson for me in this incident was the unanimity of the entire group in deciding that there are occasions when continuance of a conflict or leaving the field are preferable to resolution

of a conflict by balloting or force. This incident had a particularly dramatic impact on me, but sixteen years of working in Japanese businesses as a manager and participating in university committees as a committee member and occasional chairperson have demonstrated to me that tolerance for continued conflict is, in fact, a normal, accepted and frequently employed means of managing conflict.

Differing Strategies for Managing and Resolving Conflict

When the Japanese do decide to try to resolve a conflict the methods they employ may differ in important ways from those employed in a culture such as that of the USA. If the parties to the conflict are Japanese and Americans, then the measures they seek to use for managing or reducing the conflict may in turn aggravate that very conflict. There are four particular mechanisms that may be used quite differently in the two cultures. They are reestablishing mutual trust, effective persuasion, bargaining and negotiation and leveling (Burgoon and Ruffner pp. 501–502).

Reestablishing Mutual Trust

The Japanese also believe that reestablishing mutual trust is necessary for resolution of interpersonal conflicts, however their preferred methods are quite different from such American techniques as offering compromise and self-disclosure. In the latter case, the Japanese are often offended and embarrassed by self-disclosures and may view self-disclosure as a child-like attempt of the disclosers to make themselves dependent and burden the listener with an unwanted obligation. Likewise, the Japanese may view a compromise offered without the requisite formal apology as a trick, a sign of weakness or an admission of guilt. Compromise may work to reduce conflict at a later stage, but, in general, not before mutual trust has already been reestablished.

The Japanese prefer to reestablish mutual trust by means of a go-between. The go-between is an individual with strong ties to both parties to the conflict who can be trusted to listen faithfully and carefully to both sides and report what each side wishes to say on the matter to the other. The individual may also advise both sides as to the timing and appropriate content of steps toward compromise and eventual resolution. Most importantly, the go-between serves as a guarantor of the good faith of both sides and of the resolution to the conflict. The go-between is not a professional mediator such as a lawyer or counsellor, nor does the mediator serve as an arbitrator. A go-between is required neither to have formal training in resolving conflicts nor even knowledge of the details of the dispute. A go-between has no powers of decision-making or enforcement. The go-between's sole function is to open a channel of communication between the parties to the conflict and facilitate that flow when able. Because of the go-between's non-professional and rather passive role, a party to a conflict who is from a culture such as that of the USA may view the go-between as either unnecessary to the process of resolution or even as an impediment. Since the reestablishment of mutual trust is of primary importance in the resolution of conflict, both parties must carefully examine their communicative

behavior to insure that it will be perceived and interpreted correctly. Otherwise, the best of intentions may well serve to aggravate and intensify the conflict rather than lead to its resolution.

Persuasion

Persuasion has not been and is not highly regarded by the Japanese as a form of conflict resolution. In particular, that form of persuasion in which the source relies upon the logic of his or her position rather than stressing identity and similarity of objectives with the receiver is viewed as being machiavellian or even one step short of force. Japanese rhetorical tradition prefers a process of *awase* or gradual coalescing of views with *sasshi* providing an opportunity for the receiver to reach the conclusion in advance of, or even without, the source's explicit statement of that conclusion (Okabe, 1983). It is perfectly possible for the Japanese to agree with the logic of another's position without accepting it or agreeing with it. Similarly, Japanese may interpret an expression like "I understand" as meaning acceptance. *Awase* is neither compromise nor "log-rolling" it is a process of creating a relationship based on common respect, and understanding of the interpersonal, emotional and rational aspects of a dispute. *Awase* is actually a communication process by which all parties are given ample opportunity to express themselves and thus reaffirm their common identification with superordinate goals which may or may not be directly related to the dispute at hand.

Bargaining and Negotiation

Bargaining and negotiation are also acceptable methods for resolving conflict in the Japanese culture, but once again the details of the procedure may vary in significant ways from those utilized in the United States. In institutionalized bargaining, for example, the weaker party in the process will often engage in a ritualized show of strength and solidarity before commencing negotiations. The annual spring labor offensive in which strikes of an hour's duration are announced months in advance and which may still be carried out even when the negotiators are fairly close to agreement are examples of this. Rituals surrounding bargaining are also common in the culture of the USA, but the symbolism of Japanese rituals in such cases has a much stronger interpersonal and emotional basis. *Awase* and *sasshi* are important aspects of Japanese bargaining and negotiation. Gestures which indicate an understanding of the human issues involved or a willingness to attempt conciliation are positively evaluated while rigidity on minor issues especially if they are related to human factors can impair the resolution of more substantive points of disagreement. Emotional release by "counting coup" (ritualized release of aggression) as demonstrated, for example, by a lunch hour strike may be an important turning point in Japanese-style bargaining.

Leveling

Leveling, in particular, may cause problems for American participants in a encounter characterized by conflict. Leveling is generally used in the culture of the USA to reestablish trust. Japanese, however, may view it as an attempt to saddle the object of the leveling with unwanted social and personal obligations. Leveling is a mark of the mature individual

in the U. S., but to the Japanese, the leveler appears childish because he or she is unable to ascertain or influence the interpersonal factors in the encounter except by being expilict. The Japanese evaluate subtlety and innuendo very highly as is indicated by the reserve with which very emotional scenes are portrayed in Japanese novels and motion pictures. The adult, refined and educated Japanese is reserved and capable of expressing profound and deep ideas and emotions with great subtlety by minimum modes of overt communicative behavior. Perhaps, in cross-cultural and intercultural encounters communication will of necessity be explicit and overt. The point is that such explicitness cannot always be positively valued. Leveling may, however, be used outside of formal and semi-formal conflict settings such as at a drinking party. Even here, however, it must be spontaneous and not perceived as an overt attempt to influence or create obligations for the receiver.

The fact that these commonly used and referred to strategies may be perceived and valued differently in the cultures of the USA and Japan does not, of course, mean that they cannot be used. Nor does it mean one side must attempt to utilize the culturally preferred strategies, values and interpretations of the other. Nor does it mean that meaningful management or resolution of a conflict is impossible. What it does mean is that both sides to such a conflict must understand that their "good intentions" and "reliable" methods for managing and resolving conflict are far from being natural, logical or universal. They are, rather, the products of specific cultures. Each side should be aware of the purpose of their communicative behavior and attempt as much as possible to ascertain the manner in which that behavior will be perceived, interpreted, evaluated and responded to by the other side. Only on that basis can both sides then negotiate and establish contextual rules for the mutual management and resolution of the conflicts that will inherently arise in cross-cultural encounters.

Conclusion

Conflict in cross-cultural settings is complicated by differing values which affect both the communication process itself and the managemet and resolution of conflict. The Japanese culture holds values toward the self, social relations, human nature and the accomplishment of tasks that may often give rise to conflict when dealing with members of a culture such as that of the United States. Moreover, the Japanese have a great sensitivity to the potential for conflict in interpersonal settings and a preference for managing conflict indirectly by tolerance and leaving the field in many cases. They also value the use of mediators in resolving conflicts when they choose to deal with the conflict directly and may react negatively to such American strategies for managing conflict as self-disclosure and leveling. Other strategies for managing conflict in the Japanese culture such as bargaining, negotiating and persuading are conceptualized and manifested in ways that differ significantly from those concepts with similar labels in the USA.

Notes

1. Their levels are intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, and institutional. I would extend the paradigm to include intracultural, cross-cultural and intercultural as well. For me

intercultural and cross-cultural is a continuum where communication behavior in the latter is dominated by the cultural norms of the parties to the encounter and where the communication in the former is characterized by the formation of communicative norms not typical of the cultures of orientation of the parties to the encounter.

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